

Circus and Villa of Massenzio



The monumental area was formed by three main buildings: the Palace, the Circus and the Mausoleum. The one still existing, the Circus, 530 meters long and 90 meters wide, was built by the Emperor Marco Aurelio Valerio Massenzio in 309 BC, added to the Royal Palace and dedicated to his son Romolo, died at the age of nine and buried right into the Mausoleum, held within a huge four-sided portico: of the former building on two levels, today the only part remaining is the cylindrical body of the elevation of the crypt, while a farmhouse dating back to 1700 stands where once was the pronaos.

At the top of the Circus there were two semi cylindrical towers,

16 meters high; between them there were 12 rooms from which race chariots used to start. In the centre of the arena there used to be the "spina", a barrier along the longitudinal axis around which the chariots went around, where a 16,54-metre-high obelisk was settled.

In 1649 the obelisk was moved by Innocenzo X in the middle of the Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi by Bernini, in Navona Square. On the curve of the Circus stood a huge Triumphal Arch and the terraces had more than 10.000 seats. The whole area was acquired by the Municipality of Rome in 1943, thanks to an expropriation.

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Bus: 218

Open: Tuesday- Sunday h9.00 - h13.30 (Last entrance @ h13.30)

Closed: Monday

Tomb of Cecilia Metella

Built between 25 and 10 BC, it is the sepulchre in the best state (and the best known) in the Appian Way, a model for the following imperial funerary monuments. This cylindrical Mausoleum is 11 metres high, with a diameter of 30 metres, and it stands upon a cubic basement, following a typical Hellenistic solution. It is covered by travertine and adorned on the top by a frieze with festoons and bucranes (oxens skulls), again typical Hellenistic decorations. The bucranes motif gave to the place the name of "capo di bove" (head of ox) and became a characteristic element of Roman funerary decoration.

The sepulchral chamber was dedicated to Cecilia, daughter of Quinti Cecilio Metello Cretico and wife of Licinio Crasso. In 1302 it was transformed into a fortress by the Caetani Family and increased in height thanks to a battlement, still visible nowadays, added together with a tower and a nearby castle; by the hypogeum you can still see a lava flow dating back to 260.000 years ago. Face to the tomb of Cecilia Metella you can visit the remains of the castrum and those of the Church of St. Nicola.

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Open: *Summer* Tuesday- Sunday h9.00 - h19.15 (Last entrance @ h18.15)

Closed: Monday

Winter Tuesday- Sunday h9.00 - h16.30 (Last entrance @ h15.30)